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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002207

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [UNESCO](#) [SCUL](#) [PBTS](#) [TH](#) [CB](#)  
SUBJECT: PREAH VIHEAR: TENSION, DIALOGUE, AND EMBASSY  
RECOMMENDATIONS

REF: A. BANGKOK 2137 (CRIMINAL CHARGES)  
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2111 (FM RESIGNS)  
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 1951 (NO-CONFIDENCE DEBATE)

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission, James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C) Tensions in the Thai-Cambodian border area remain high, with an influx of Thai soldiers to the area close to Preah Vihear temple. The Royal Thai Air Force is standing by to evacuate Thais from Cambodia should bilateral relations deteriorate dramatically before a Thai-Cambodian meeting of top-level security officials scheduled for Monday, July 21. Further heightening tensions on the Thai side are protestors from the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), who clashed with Sisaket province locals in an attempt to protest at the temple site. The clash resulted in photos of bloodied protestors and local villagers on the front page of most Thai papers. Prime Minister Samak, in public statements, criticized PAD for attempting to use Preah Vihear's disposition to promote a coup d'etat. Considering the polarized and volatile political environment in Thailand, we recommend that the USG avoid becoming embroiled in this emotional territorial dispute at present. Post has distributed a warden message advising American citizens to avoid the temple area. End Summary.

TROOP INFLUX INTO CONTESTED AREA

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[1](#)2. (C) An intelligence officer attached to the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC) office in Sisaket (near Preah Vihear) told us on July 18 that there were more than 400 Thai soldiers in the area of the Preah Vihear temple with the mission to enhance security of the temple and border region. However, a contact at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said the number of Thai troops was closer to 1,000. (Note: We do not have a clear understanding of exactly where in the border area the Thai troops are positioned, but our sources tell us they are in an area of overlapping Thai-Cambodian claims. End note.) Thai press quoted Suranaree Task Force Commander Major General Kanok Nettarakawaysana as stating that he has been in the border area for three days and is waiting for negotiations to begin

with Cambodian authorities about the disputed territory near the temple. Air Force Chief Chalit Phukpasuk was quoted as saying that the Royal Thai Air Force is prepared to evacuate Thais residing in Cambodia with one hour's notice.

#### THAI MEDIA COVERAGE

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13. (C) Reports of tension on the Thailand-Cambodia border continue to dominate Thai newspaper headlines, with photos depicting outbreaks of violence between People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) protestors and local residents. (Note: PAD was formed as an anti-Thaksin group, and its core purpose is blocking former Prime Minister Thaksin's return to influence. End Note.) The press reported heavily on the July 17 appearance of PAD protestors who were confronted by around 200 locals during a march to gain access to the temple. According to reports, over 100 carloads of PAD protestors, stretching for two kilometers, attempted to reach the temple before being confronted by local anti-PAD protestors, who blocked the road around 8 kilometers from the temple. Our contact at ISOC told us that there were around 2,000 PAD protestors during the July 17 march. The violence started when PAD demonstrators ordered their security personnel to break through police barriers of wood and barbed wire. The locals reacted by throwing objects at the protestors, at which point the police intervened. Many local residents of Sisaket rely on tourism for their livelihood, and they are reportedly upset with the PAD because the increased tension has hurt their business interests.

#### MFA: SITUATION UNDER CONTROL

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14. (C) Deputy Director General of the East Asian Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Pisanu Suvanajata told us on July 18 that PAD had not only protested at the entrance to temple site on Preah Vihear mountain, but also at the Cambodian Consulate in Sa Kaeo Province. A leading member of the PAD movement who led supporters to Preah Vihear on July 17 told us that PAD has since left the area, but the situation remained very tense. He claimed that PAD did not plan to return to the vicinity of Preah Vihear. He added that the remaining protestors belong to the Dharmayatra (Dharma March) movement, led by media and social activist Saman Si-ngam. This group, formed in May 2008 and heretofore unknown, consists of civilians from Bangkok and Sisaket Province who marched toward Preah Vihear to meditate and claim Thai sovereignty over the temple.

15. (C) Despite tension on the ground, the RTG has expressed confidence that the situation is under control. Pisanu told us that the RTG has ordered provincial authorities to control future PAD movements and to continue to limit their access to the area. He referred to a letter sent by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen to Thai Prime Minister Samak that requested a withdrawal of Thai troops. (The text of this letter has been e-mailed to EAP/MLS.) Pisanu said this letter showed dialogue was ongoing. He noted that "as long as the two leaders can still talk, it is under control," although he added that Hun Sen's request was unacceptable since Thai troops were in overlapping or disputed territory. Pisanu, one of the six government officials alleged by PAD to have committed a criminal offence through the handling of Preah Vihear's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List, blamed the current tension on the combination of PAD stirring-up the issue and the presence of Cambodian troops at the border. Prime Minister Samak publicly chastised the three protestors who crossed into the disputed territory on July 14, accusing them of trying to elicit a violent reaction from border security. Samak also blamed PAD for the public furor over the temple and said the group hoped to inspire another coup d'etat.

#### UPCOMING MEETING

16. (C) Thai and Cambodian officials intend to meet on July 21 in Sa Kaeo province to discuss the situation. This will be an emergency meeting of the General Border Committee, which is normally chaired by Defense Ministers and normally meets once per year. MFA contacts have told us that the Thai side will be represented by Royal Thai Armed Forces Supreme Commander General Boonsrang Niumpradit. The Thais expect that the Cambodian side will be represented by either the Cambodian Defense Minister or Supreme Commander.

#### ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

17. (C) In Thailand, the issue of Preah Vihear's disposition has become extraordinarily politicized. The opposition Democrat Party focused on Preah Vihear above all else in the June no-confidence debate (ref C); PAD has filed a request for charges of capital crimes against the officials involved (ref A); and the Constitutional Court used the Thai-Cambodian Joint Communiqué to open the door to the cabinet's impeachment, prompting the Foreign Minister's resignation (ref B). The temple's disposition hits a raw nerve with some Thais, and some significant actors are actively manipulating the controversy to advance their anti-Thaksin agenda.

18. (C) We recommend that the USG avoid becoming embroiled in this emotional territorial dispute, especially during this time of polarized and volatile Thai politics. We suggest that we only address Preah Vihear issues on an "if asked" basis, urging in general terms that all parties work in a spirit of good will and cooperation to resolve their concerns peacefully and diplomatically, and to create an atmosphere in which the existing mechanisms (such as the upcoming General Border Committee meeting) to resolve border issues can function.

#### WARDEN MESSAGE

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19. (U) With CA/OCS concurrence, post has distributed a warden message citing tensions along the Thai-Cambodian border and recommending that American citizens defer travel to the area near the temple.

JOHN